OPENING THE DOORS OF LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
SAOUG 14 FEBRUARY 2018
UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 4(e)

“TO TAKE ALL APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF DISABILITY BY ANY PERSON, ORGANISATION OR PRIVATE ENTERPRISE”
Disability Definition

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disability is:

“an evolving concept and disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers”.

It recognises persons with disabilities as those persons who have:

“long-term physical, mental, intellectual, neurological, psychosocial or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.
New upgraded open space on Braamfontein West Campus
Disability and education

- Children with disabilities are less likely to attend schools, with less opportunities to enter into post school education and employment opportunities (higher unemployment rate). The result, decreased productivity and poorer with extra costs resulting from the disability.

- We need to break the cycle by addressing poverty and disability from a holistic perspective. In doing this, people with disabilities will be able to demonstrate their ABILITIES and be allowed to participate fully in all aspects of everyday life.
Services are needed for students with disabilities that work towards mainstreaming students in terms of the entire tertiary training experience, including the academic and social programme and work readiness.

By rendering services and putting in place reasonable accommodations we assist in removing the barriers that prevent students with disabilities from learning and demonstrating in a fair and equal way what they have learned.
Institutions in the PSET system throughout South Africa have made progress in addressing the right for reasonable accommodation for and services to persons with disabilities but much still needs to be done.

- In the Education White Paper 6, the Ministry of Education committed “our higher education institutions to increasing the access of learners with special education needs.” (White Paper 6. 2001:2.2.5.1) & White Paper for Post-School Education and Training Chapter 6; 2013 continues to acknowledge and drive the importance of access.

- The White Paper (2013) also called for a Policy Framework to address and formalise services to students with disabilities in the Post School environment.

- The policy framework was drawn up by a ministerial committee during 2015 and after public comments served at Cabinet, it should be implemented by DHET soon. It is foreseen that this will map the way forward for standardised and comprehensive service provision for students with disabilities.
Support services available to students with disabilities:

- Disability Rights Units (DRU)
- Libraries
Support services available to students with disabilities: Disability Rights Units

- The mission of Disability Rights Units should be to ensure that all students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities and participate, freely and actively, in all facets of university life.
- Disability Rights Units offer services across a broad spectrum of disabilities, including: Physical, visual, hearing, psychological, learning and chronic illnesses.
Services include but are not limited to:

- Orientation (mobility and IT training)
- Access (conversion of material into accessible digital, braille or audio format)
- Environmental and physical access
- Sign Language Interpreter & Real-time captioner
- IT software support
- Computer centre and Test & Exams venue for students using assistive technology (AT)
- Extra Time and other relevant concessions
Libraries: Background

- GALIC (Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium) - Project of FOTIM (Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis).

- Started in 1996 with the installation of a common automated library system. All FOTIM projects, including the GAELIC programme, were closed down in 2011.

- As part of a consortium, GAELIC had several opportunities to be included in projects and discussions that were not exclusively related to academic library issues.

- Project was started to investigate services to students with disabilities at higher education institutions.

- GAELIC applied for and was successful in being awarded a grant in February 2010 by the South African Library and Information (SALI) Trust.

- This presentation will highlight some of the practical considerations that were identified.
Libraries: Universal Design

- Produce buildings & products that are accessible to both people with and without disabilities.
- Considers the broadest possible range of users from the beginning.
- Increases access for many unintended users.
- Universal Design for Learning: Framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments.
- Accommodates individual learning differences.
- Need to create curricula and learning environments that provide multiple/alternative means of representation, expression and engagement.
Libraries: Attitude

- Be flexible and try to meet the needs of all users.
- Create a positive organisational attitude towards people with disabilities.
- Appoint dedicated staff to be responsible for users with disabilities and publicise contact details of relevant staff members.
- Raise awareness of all types of disabilities through staff training, leaflets and information boards.
- Front-line staff should have an awareness of issues surrounding communication with people with disabilities.
  - Address and make eye contact with the person rather than with any support worker.
  - Don’t shout, speak naturally
Libraries: Attitude

- Respect privacy and the right not to disclose a disability.
- Form a disability services group involving members of staff who work in different areas and have different skills.
- Senior managers need to have a thorough understanding of legal issues; other staff may need only a brief outline.
- Security staff should have a basic awareness of disability issues, and be aware of rules regarding access for guide dogs and helpers.
- The design and delivery of all user information must be inclusive and employ a multi-sensory approach and flexible teaching style.
- Conduct regular audits of all aspects of service delivery and accessibility.
When speaking to students who have hearing impairments, staff should be encouraged to speak naturally and not to shout, keeping the face and mouth visible and maintain eye contact.

Provide some guidance in how to work with an interpreter such as allowing time for communication after speaking and speaking directly to the person, not the interpreter.

Make staff aware that English may not be a deaf person’s first language, that there are different sign languages and that different grammatical structures apply.
Offer online and telephonic renewals.

Provide staff to accompany people to the shelves to assist with the retrieval of material.

Provide material in both electronic and print format.

Provide a staffed lending desk service in addition to self-issue machines.

Offer staffed photocopying facilities (including enlarged copies/colour).

Make a book retrieval service available on request.

Run individual or specialised induction sessions for students with disabilities.

Make user communication available through a variety of media - text message, fax, email and so on.
Grant the relaxation of fines where applicable, and make allowances for late arrivals or missed appointments.

Provide assistive technology hardware and software, as well as the necessary training for staff and users alike.

Provide access and support for assistants and support workers and provide the facilities for them to take out books on behalf of the users with disabilities.

Advertise and maintain mechanisms for complaints and suggestions, with clarity of feedback and a prompt response.
Training sessions:

- Keeping changes to routines to a minimum and notify students well in advance of changes to venues and appointment times.
- Support the use of voice recorders in training sessions.
- Providing an outline of all sessions at the start.
- Using a range of teaching techniques to address a variety of learning styles.
Ensure that enquiry points and workstations are well lit and away from any significant background noise.

Provide adequate seating and a swivel facility for monitors, so that on-screen information can be shared.

Design printed materials in a style that will be as accessible for as many people as possible.

Provide signage and direction information for people with a range of disabilities.

Make designated parking space and convenient drop-off points available.
Ensuring that the library entry is accessible and that lift and alternative access to all floors is present.

Provide adequate lighting, external and internal and ensure that light switches are at a suitable level for wheelchair users.

Negotiate personal emergency evacuation plans for students who may experience difficulty with emergency procedures.

Make all staff aware of the fire evacuation procedures for users with disabilities and ensure availability of evacu-chairs and strobe alarms.

Provide a dedicated area in which to work, with the available software, where tape recorders and screen reading software and such like will not disturb other users.
Libraries: Environment

- Ensure that entry ways such as doors that open automatically and pin back magnetically are at least one meter wide.
- Monitor adequate lifts access and usage such as call button heights, braille buttons and voice announcements.
- Check the clearance space such as between rows of shelving and make sure that aisles are free of obstacles.
- Consider the provision of additional aids such as help-phones on all floors to enable users to request assistance with accessing resources and negotiating stairs and lifts.
- Ensure that the lighting in all service areas is adequate to support lip reading clarity.
Libraries: Environment

- Provide study spaces which do not face the wall, or install mirrors, so users are aware of what is happening behind them.
- Purchase DVD and video material with subtitles where possible.
- Provide a visible warning signal at closing time, and in case of emergencies.
- Work hand-in-hand with DRU to determine best software to use as well as possibility of placing some assistive devices in the library (e.g. eye pal, for blind people - able to take a photo of text and read back to student).
Ensure that appropriate software is loaded on workstations (such as reading text aloud, sophisticated spell checking / grammar checking facility, text highlighting, study skills tools, mind mapping software and bibliographic management software, colour overlays etc).

Ensure that access password information is available in various formats, and that procedures are in place to supply forgotten passwords.

Make sure that all catalogue enquiry points are connected to a printer to assist users who might experience difficulties in locating books.

Provide clear library floor plans and subject guides in a range of formats.

Where possible use colour coding to designate subject areas.

Providing information leaflets with pictorial information and using adequate sized fonts.
For students with disabilities, the PSET sector offers an opportunity for possible economic empowerment and is thus considered a means for truly impacting their quality of life (Fuller, Healey, Bradley et al. 2004; Shaw 2009).

Unfortunately, in reality, students with disabilities often face a series of barriers to learning and participation at university.

The barriers that they face are mainly related to:
1. Attitudinal (i.e. negative attitudes)
2. Access: Structural (i.e. buildings) & Inaccessible curricula
3. Resource-related (human and financial)
Voice of Students: Research

- Research has been conducted in South Africa regarding the provision for students with disabilities, focusing specifically on their own experiences (Howell, 2005 and 2006; Howell and Lazarus, 2003; Matshedisho 2007a and 2007b, Pretorius, Yates, 2014).

- The research indicates that **personal characteristics and autonomy/independence** help students with disabilities to transition successfully to university.

- **Advocacy and self-advocacy:** Students with disabilities need to take ownership and communicate their needs. Practical and emotional support is important with the overall campus climate central to adjustment, happiness and academic success.
Students with disabilities are typically not a homogenous group and thus their support requirements differ and can change over time.

**Awareness & Stereotypes:** Students report difficulties related to (Swart and Greyling 2011):

1. Attitudes of lecturers and community in general
2. Physical spaces
3. Assessment accommodations
4. Curriculum delivery
5. Provision of user-friendly handouts
Voice of Students: Research recommendations:

- There is a need for **information and orientation sessions** for students with disabilities (Morina, Lopez-Gavira and Molina 2016)
- Participation will be enhanced if students with disabilities develop **self-determination** (Swart & Greyling 2011)
- Support should aim not to change students with disabilities but to **enable** them – they learn differently but have the same ideals as any other student (Swart and Greyling 2011)
- Accessible, flexible, appropriate and responsive **curricula and learning spaces** are crucial if the learning needs of a diverse student population are to be met (Ohajunwa, Mckenzie & Lorenzo 2015; Howell and Lazarus 2003; Bell 2013)
Access & Universal design:
1. Buildings should be accessible (Howell and Lazarus 2003)
2. Academic staff should be trained on achieving universal design in instruction firstly as part of a formal teaching qualification and secondly, as part of their continuous learning requirements (FOTIM 2011)

Through paying attention to the voice of students with disabilities and the implementation of the above mentioned recommendations, PSET institutions could be made more welcoming and equitable for students with disabilities (Pretorius, Lawton-Misra, N, 2013)
Conclusion

All Post School Education Institutions should have Disability Policies in place, which serves as a written commitment to admit and to support eligible students with disabilities. The policy protects the rights of disabled students registered at the University.

Apart from services to students, units should also provide disability training, awareness and advocacy workshops among staff, students and the general community.

Combined stakeholder efforts, all committed towards enabling persons with disabilities to access good healthcare, transport, facilities and assistive aids, are key to enabling persons with disabilities to access education and the workplace.
Thank you!

WORKING TOGETHER, WE CAN ALL HELP TO BREAK BARRIERS AND CHANGE THE PERCEPTIONS OF OTHERS!